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RHMFIUU/COMSIXTHFLT PRIORITY

UNCLAS TEL AVIV 000887

SIPDIS

STATE FOR NEA, NEA/IPA, NEA/PPD

WHITE HOUSE FOR PRESS OFFICE, SIT ROOM
NSC FOR NEA STAFF

SECDEF WASHDC FOR USDP/ASD-PA/ASD-ISA
HQ USAF FOR XXXX
DA WASHDC FOR SASA
JOINT STAFF WASHDC FOR PA
CDR USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL FOR POLAD/USIA ADVISOR
COMSOCEUR VAHINGEN GE FOR PAO/POLAD
COMSIXTHFLT FOR 019

JERUSALEM ALSO ICD
LONDON ALSO FOR HKANONA AND POL
PARIS ALSO FOR POL
ROME FOR MFO

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TAGS: [OPRC](#) [KMDR](#) [IS](#)

SUBJECT: ISRAEL MEDIA REACTION

SUBJECTS COVERED IN THIS REPORT:

[1](#)1. Mideast

[1](#)2. Italy: Parliamentary Elections

Key stories in the media:

All media reported on the killing of three IDF soldiers and the

wounding of three others in a Hamas ambush yesterday. Major media characterized what was the most intense day of fighting in Gaza in over a month to the "Lebanese quagmire" before 2000. The media reported that IDF forces subsequently killed 20 Palestinians. Ha'aretz and other media reported that Palestinian fatalities included at least 10 civilians, five children, and a Reuters cameraman. Israel Radio reported that Hamas instructed its military wing to respond to Israel's action in every possible way, but that talks to achieve a truce are still continuing in Egypt. Israel Radio reported that Palestinians later launched rockets at Israel. The Jerusalem Post reported that Israel is considering a large-scale incursion into Gaza soon after President Bush's visit. Ha'aretz quoted Defense Minister Ehud Barak as saying at a Labor rally yesterday that the plight of Gazans is a concern, but secondary to the security of Israeli civilians nearby. In a side story, Ha'aretz reported that the state had earlier issued a demolition order for the home of a Bedouin soldier Manhash al-Bayat, who was among the three IDF soldiers killed.

Leading media reported that NSA Hadley has begun preparations for next month's visit by President Bush with a 24-hour stopover in Jerusalem to discuss the negotiations with the Palestinians and the sanctions against Iran. Hadley met with PM Olmert on Tuesday, and with FM Tzipi Livni on Wednesday. The Jerusalem Post quoted a statement issued by the Foreign Ministry, according to which Hadley and Livni discussed the diplomatic process with an emphasis on Israel's security arrangements in any future agreement. The Jerusalem Post reported that Hadley and Livni also discussed the necessity of "continued international action" to increase sanctions on Iran. Livni, according to her office, briefed Hadley on her trip earlier this week to Qatar. Ha'aretz reported that Likud Chairman MK Benjamin Netanyahu told Hadley yesterday that President Bush should proclaim that Israel's borders are "defensible."

Leading media reported that senior Hamas leaders Mahmoud Zahar and Said Siam traveled to Cairo yesterday for talks with former U.S. President Jimmy Carter and Egyptian officials on the latest developments in Gaza. The Jerusalem Post quoted Hamas spokesman Ayman Taha as saying that Zahar and Siam would brief Carter on the "suffering of the Palestinians as a result of the Israeli-imposed siege of Gaza." The Jerusalem Post quoted sources close to Hamas as saying that the talks would focus on Egypt's efforts to release Gilad Shalit. However, the sources told The Jerusalem Post that they were unaware of any progress on the Shalit case. The Jerusalem Post reported that Kadima MK Yohanan Plesner told Carter on Wednesday that Olmert did not mean to insult him. Leading media quoted Yisrael Beiteinu leader Avigdor Lieberman as saying that he told Carter: "Meeting a terrorist like Khaled Mashal only encourages and increases terrorism."

All three major Hebrew-language dailies included pre-Passover interviews with PM Olmert (full transcripts in tomorrow's newspapers). He told Ha'aretz and Maariv that "Iran will not go nuclear." In the interview with Yediot, Olmert admitted that Israel and Syria are exchanging messages and said that "Israelis are not being threatened by a nuclear Syria." Israel Radio quoted Syrian President Bashar Assad as saying that his country is prepared to go to war with Israel -- but not in the near future.

Israel Radio reported that yesterday, in a phone conversation with PA President Mahmoud Abbas who is currently in Moscow to discuss possible Middle East peace talks, Knesset Speaker Dalia Itzik sharply criticized Abbas's granting of awards to two female Palestinian terrorists detained in Israel. The radio quoted Abbas as saying that the PA has rescinded its decision. The Jerusalem Post reported that Livni pointed out to National Security Advisor Stephen Hadley on Wednesday the message it sends about the PA's willingness to fight terror.

Ha'aretz and The Jerusalem Post quoted Polish President Lech Kaczynski as saying at a meeting with President Peres yesterday that his country will take a firm stance on Iran.

Ha'aretz reported that Attorney General Menachem Mazuz has decided to suspend proceedings against the Jerusalem Waqf, in the wake of a complaint lodged by some 150 people. The complainants accused the Waqf of causing repeated damage to the antiquities on the Temple Mount, and to the nation's heritage.

The Jerusalem Post quoted sources to Olmert as saying yesterday that he will make a series of political appointments in an effort to strengthen his coalition as soon as Passover is over (in the middle of next week).

Yediot reported that real estate "sharks" in Tehran might pull down synagogues and construct high-rise buildings in their stead. The newspaper said that this is not anti-Semitism, but greed. Yediot quoted Menashe Amir, who is in charge of Israel Radio's Persian-language broadcasts, as saying that it is painful to watch the destruction of the Jewish heritage in Iran.

The Jerusalem Post reported that the private, New York-based Nefesh B'Nefesh organization will likely be closely integrated into Jewish Agency immigration operations. The two groups sparred for two years over the sharing of funds and publicity, and severed ties last year. Maariv reported that veteran Ethiopian immigrants are opposed to the immigration of Falash Mura to Israel, who the old-timers say are Christians who only pretend to be Jews. The Falash Mura are Ethiopians whose Jewish ancestors converted to Christianity.

I. Mideast:

Summary:

The independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz editorialized: "An Israeli show of seriousness about a two-state solution might speed up the [normalization] process. We are likely to discover that peace with the Gulf states will be the warm kind."

Washington correspondent Shmuel Rosner wrote in Ha'aretz: "The choice of those who still continue to insist on the need to listen to [Jimmy] Carter is based on lies -- it is possible to ignore him, protest his manipulative tricks, and still continue to work for true peace between Israel and the Arabs. There is no contradiction."

Senior columnist Moshe Ishon wrote in the nationalist, Orthodox Makor Rishon-Hatzofe: "During his last days in the White House President Bush may grasp the understandings between Olmert and Abu Mazen in a way contradicting Israel's interests."

Block Quotes:

I. "The Gulf Is not Persian"

The independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz editorialized (4/17): "If Oman took a one-millimeter step toward Israel this week, Qatar, which extended its hospitality to Livni, advanced a respectable few meters. The Foreign Minister, too, believes that Qatar went almost all the way.... Qatar and Oman are prominent recent examples, but other Gulf states, too, seem to have undergone a certain change where Israel is concerned.... The need to resolve the Palestinian issue does concern the regimes of the Gulf, but they are no less preoccupied with regional stability, economic growth, the international stock markets and investment and development possibilities. There is another factor at play here, regional realignment away from old, obsolete camps and the common fear of a radical Shiite axis led by Iran, which, once armed with nuclear weapons, could render the wealth of the Gulf nations irrelevant. Livni's visit to Qatar and her meetings with Gulf state leaders were not unprecedented. Nevertheless, a broader and more overt bridge has now been established between Israel and these countries, and there is now a greater possibility of deep, sincere and serious dialogue, held directly and without requiring Israel to ingratiate itself in exchange for a handshake or a joint photo. There is still a long road to normalization, and the basic distrust of Israel's intentions will not disappear tomorrow or even a year from now. However, an Israeli show of seriousness about a two-state solution might speed up the process. We are likely to discover that peace with the Gulf states will be the warm kind."

II. "Just Say No to Carter"

Washington correspondent Shmuel Rosner wrote in Ha'aretz (4/17):

"The honor due [Jimmy] Carter for his help in reaching the peace treaty between Israel and Egypt is written in the history books, but he did not come to the Middle East this week for honor, but to work. And his work, for years, has had one goal: undermining the status of Israel, thwarting its policies and ridiculing its hopes. That is why Israel acted correctly in having him meet with only the ceremonial echelon -- President Shimon Peres -- and avoided having him meet with those who are supposed to be doing the work: Prime Minister Ehud Olmert and Defense Minister Ehud Barak.... Carter, once the exaggerated attention is stripped away, is nothing but a nuisance -- a painful reminder of the electorate's failure. His views do not represent the American public, his actions are not viewed favorably by the administrations that followed him -- Democrats and Republicans alike -- and his righteous trouble-making is just a guise for continued hostility to Israel, which he views as partially responsible for ending his presidential career after only a single term. In any case, the choice of those who still continue to insist on the need to listen to Carter is based on lies -- it is possible to ignore him, protest his manipulative tricks, and still continue to work for true peace between Israel and the Arabs. There is no contradiction."

III. "A Confidential Meeting"

Senior columnist Moshe Ishon wrote in the nationalist, Orthodox Makor Rishon-Hatzofe (4/17): "According to media reports, the Prime Minister relies on the position of Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni, according to which Jerusalem will be divided into two capitals -- an Israeli one and a Palestinian one. The debate is about the Temple Mount and the Western Wall. Israel demands that the Temple Mount remain in its hands, or in an international autonomous authority in which Israelis and Palestinians will have equal rights in this holy place, while the Western Wall would remain under exclusive Israeli control. There is another debate on control of holy places in the Old City.... It seems that the [latest] brief encounter between Olmert and Abu Mazen was neither timely nor appropriate. Not only did it not contribute to progress in the Israeli-Palestinian peace process. It could present controversial issues to the international scene in a distorted fashion. During his last days in the White House President Bush may grasp the understandings between Olmert and Abu Mazen in a way contradicting Israel's interests."

12. Italy: Parliamentary Elections:

Summary:

The conservative, independent Jerusalem Post editorialized: "This week's dramatic elections in Italy promise to redraw that country's political map and to change its relations with Israel -- both to propitious effect."

Block Quotes:

"Congratulazioni, Signor Berlusconi"

The conservative, independent Jerusalem Post editorialized (4/17): "This week's dramatic elections in Italy promise to redraw that country's political map and to change its relations with Israel -- both to propitious effect.... In once again casting their lot with Berlusconi, with all of his faults, Italians have expressed the hope that the realignment over which he now presides may redress Italy's chronic political instability and volatility.... The main cause for optimism in Jerusalem is Berlusconi's long-standing warmth for Israel. The new Italian Right, led by his Forza Italia, has to a large extent legitimized pro-Israel positions in Italy. His last administration, it will be recalled, spearheaded the campaign to force the European Union to list Hamas as a terror organization. 'I feel the suffering of the people in Israel personally, he told Yediot Aharonot last month.... Israel's political relationship with this critical European ally needs to be deepened, and the time for that deepening is now. We hope and believe that Italy under its new leadership will give firmer backing in international fora to Israel, that Rome will play a role in building warmer relations between Israel and the European Union generally, and that we can henceforth

more concertedly grapple with our common threats and challenges."

JONES